JOHN CRICHTON

A VISTA

1921

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A VISTA

BY

[JOHN CRICHTON] pseud

Guthrie, Norman Gregor

PREFACE BY

SIR ANDREW MACPHAIL

1921

A. T. CHAPMAN, MONTREAL

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
A VISTA	7
I WONDER	9
THE CONFLUENCE	10
THE WHITE PHLOX	14
FROM NEPEAN POINT	15
A COTTAGE IN AUGUST	16
ACROSS THE MOUTH OF THE ST. CROIX RIVER	17
LILIUM AURATUM	18
TIMOTHY IN BLOOM	20
A BIRD'S NEST IN WINTER	22
NOW ALL THE TIRESOME CLOUDS HAVE PASSED	23
A YOUNG WOMAN SAYING HER PRAYERS	24
SHE IS AS CHANGEFUL AS THE SEA	25
FIRESIDE	26
A SONG OF THE SUMMER NIGHT	28
A BLUE PANSY	29
THE STARS	30
THE FLOWERS OF THE FIELDS	30
THE WIND IN THE GRASS	30
FEBRUARY SNOWFALL	31
THE IRIS WALK	33
MY FRIEND	35
HOW I WANT YOU!	38
LIFE	39
IN A GARDEN	40
COLOUR	42
THE EMPRESS DAFFODIL	43

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
WHITE TRILLIUM	44
BREEZES AND SUNSHINE	46
TELEPATHY	47
RED TRILLIUM	51
A HYBRID DELPHINIUM	52
BLUE HEPATICA	54
REQUIEM	56
A SPRING GARDEN	58
DURING THE FOREST FIRES	59
INSPIRATION	60
MOTORING IN WINTER	61
REMEMBER	62
WILD COLUMBINE	64
SONG	66
IN A PINE GROVE ON A WINTER AFTERNOON	67
ILLUSION	68
TRANSIENCE	69
A ROSE	70
SONG	71
A QUESTION	72
AT NIGHT	73
THE GRAMOPHONE	74
VIEW OF OTTAWA FROM A DISTANCE LATE OCTOBER	76
A WILD IMMORTELLE	78
THE UNFAITHFUL	79
AN ALTAR CLOTH	80
RETROSPECT	81
ADIEU	83
FINALE	85

INTRODUCTION

Once again it is my privilege, and duty, to commend to all, who may be influenced by my judgement, the verse of an unknown writer. In the present case the appeal for consideration is made with more than usual confidence. This assurance is justified by the opening poem from which the book takes its title; and if all were of equal quality one might hazard the opinion that the author was entitled to take a place with authentic voice amongst the best writers of lyric verse, which is the mode of the moment. This new writer has a new way of saying things. The manner is free and fresh; there is a knowledge of the inner meaning of words and a sense of their sanctity; the metrical arrangement is interesting and true, although it does not conform completely with any established type. This means hat the writer has style. When this manuscript reached me I was bewildered. It was obviously Canadian; but the customary vague and general dissertation upon river, lake, prairie, and forest was replaced by a fine and close observation of the intimate details of landscape, which more nearly touches the heart; and the impressions are conveyed to the reader through the direct medium of passion in a manner quite foreign to the traditional Canadian verse, a passion which is ancient and almost Italian in intensity. The author appears to have beheld these scenes with newly opened eyes; it is this which gives to the verse a fresh and strange quality, which is the sign and virtue of all poetry.

ANDREW MACPHAIL

Montreal, September 1st 1921

A VISTA

I.

SOMEWHEN, upon this hillside way,
When fern and moss were brown with leaves,
She stood and breathed: a gust of day
Swept all the fields forlorn of sheaves,
Lit up the blackened branch and lit
The black pools of her eyes. Ah! this
Is just how I remember it,
And, unforgotten, have her kiss!

Her lips on mine! I scarcely saw
Shorn fields below, and shivering herds:
Or caught, above, the whirr and caw
Of southward hurrying desperate birds:
Or glanced where billowy deep blue fills
The last horizon, with the snow
Clouds balanced on the painted hills
Where life's dead bluebirds seem to go!

II.

The young leaves twitter with the spring:
Green noses push the crisp grass by;
In earth and air the blade and wing
Spread urgently: across the sky
The young white babes sleep in the blue;
The same sleek herd chews joyfully
The nibbled cud. I think, I knew
This spot would bring her back to me!

Return! O coward birds who fled
My winter! Gather, build and be
Alive with joy! and overhead
Let all the bluebirds pause where she
Is standing. Loose your songs! be sure
That we have found the last lost string.
Now for the sweet mad overture
Of life and colour, love and spring!

I WONDER

FAINT fragrant pannicles of phlox,
Still in the moonlight gathering dew,
I wonder if a spirit walks
With me and bends o'er you?
Ah! then, you were so faint and sweet
As if each flower bent an ear,
To listen for her little feet
That one could hardly hear.

Ah! tell me if a spirit walks
Beside me. Does she bend o'er you
Faint fragrant pannicles of phlox
Still in the moonlight gathering dew?
You who are just as faint and sweet
As ever: larger, lovelier grown,
O can you hear her little feet
As I walk here alone?

THE CONFLUENCE

A EUROPEAN IN CANADA

I.

ROBIN'S-EGG blue and mother of pearl
Is the sky behind; and the water's swirl
Angry and brown in the heather abyss,
A split in the hills where two torrents kiss,
And jostle and race in the selfsame bed
But mingle not, till the sea ahead
Catches them up in his careless strength
And mixes and drinks of them both at length.

II.

Out on the platform, above the stream,
She gazes long, and the sombre gleam
Under a puzzled brow compares
These wilds of ours with that world of theirs,
Her friends. Ah! well, she can go again
To the vines of France, or the hills of Spain,
Or Italy, where the azure bays

Blink in the blue. But now her gaze
Is not of memory, but desire
For breath, and air and colour and fire!
She cries for life as her nostrils spread
To the pine and the tamarac overhead!

III.

What does she think? I make a guess
She dreams of life in this wilderness!
The old world peoples and cities and art
Seem unimportant: the human heart
Beats primitive, where a wolf or moose
May break the thicket without excuse;
And the music of joy is far more sweet
In the birch and spruce than a cobbled
street
Mouldy with history, half as old
As these oaks and elms, or the black leaf
mould,
Where the wintergreen's tiny feet make
fast
In the wrack of a million summers past!

IV.

This for your street: your house a tent
On the lip of a crack in a continent,
Whose architect is the chance of force
That gouged this gorge in the hills, a
course

For the bursting lakes of the north to pour
Their wood-stained waters. There is no more,
O wise-eyed stranger from over the sea,
Than the untouched stage, where the scenery
Was tossed by the workmen who struck on the stage
Long before Babylon came of age!

V.

Her dream is passing. Her heart regrets
Her land of Popes and Plantagenets;
The land of art and the human graces,
Music and parchments, and painted faces!
This place is lonely: there isn't much
But the air and the sun to make up for such
As the stately streets and the avenues,
The ancient churches, and classic views
Of Europe—the lure of the Grecian shore
Where a broken column is valued more
Than the breath of life and the open sky,
By the tired-out tourists trudging by.

VI.

She turns her head. Can it be a sigh?
A quivering question in her eye:
A word that never passes her lip?
Who knows? She has vanished by train
and ship!

VII.

The sky is clotted with puffs of grey,
With a splash of rose for an overlay.
Where are you now? O stranger! you—
Will you come again, once more renew
The touch that thrilled, and blow on the
fire
Of resinous birch? Ah! one's desire
Is a curious phase. In a little pool
Beneath the trees I stare like a fool,
To watch the splash and the wrinkle die
Where a trout is leaping to kill a fly!

THE WHITE PHLOX

THE white phlox, slim and silent
sweet
Sways by a sea of violet,
Where the mouths of the tide and river
meet;
It is only twilight yet:
And the west is gay with orange bars
And apricot: but soon
Comes singing forth a choir of stars
Walking behind the moon.

The white phlox shimmers in the light
And turns her eye on these
White choristers who take delight
In shadowy melodies;
Unknown of horn or reed or string
A music sweeps the sea.
Ah! things that bloom and live and sing
Mean all of life to me!

The white phlox scents the night of love.
"Ah! breathe abroad and stir
The life to kisses gone: above
Your comrades sing of her!"
A breeze is dancing on the sea,
The rough tide struggles higher.
Can things as white as you and she
Know love or love's desire?

FROM NEPEAN POINT

CHINTZES of blue and silver
Draping the window sills:
The clouds and the sky descending
Over the blue-black hills.

Over the fading lintel
A crescent sliver of light:
It is the new moon shrinking
Back from the night.

Are these the hills we stared at,
Years,—is it years?—gone by?
This the same slit of moonshine,
This the same painted sky?

Two hundred years behind us
Mayhap an Iroquois
Gay in his paint and feathers
Sighed for a Huron squaw.

Two hundred years before us—
See in the selfsame place
Strange eyes that wonder westward,
Eyes of an unborn race.

Chintzes of blue grow bluer,
Hiding the window sills:
Night draws the blind effacing
Even the blue-black hills.

A COTTAGE IN AUGUST

TUCKED behind a giant lilac
Lies a cottage, white and green,
Fronting on the shifting harbour,
Not a stone's throw in between:
When the flowing tide is highest
Here he bites the land's red lips:
Fleeing, ebbing, hardly leaving
Way for little anchored ships.

There's the garden. In this corner
Dozing on the hammock's rope
Smoking, sleeping, sighing, dreaming,
One can smell the heliotrope.
And the lazy landward breezes
Loafing up across the rocks
Catch the fresh delicious pungence
Of a bed of double stocks.

Sheltered by a row of cedar
Roses seed and lilies blow,
And a clump of blood-red dahlias
Fronts a hedge of golden-glow.
Why return to troubled cities
Dust and mildew, dirt and mould?
—Here the merry sun turns mellow
Mimicking the marigold.

ACROSS THE MOUTH OF THE ST. CROIX RIVER

IF I call you, you shall come to me
Where the lilacs match the twilight sea,
And wonderful mountains, wound in mist,
Pile purple on grey and amethyst.

The green goes out of the furrowed slope,
That touches the sky's green rim. I hope
That the stars will slip in with a quiet tread
Softly as women watching the dead.

Thus, and thus only, shall we two
Meet. O my friend, the soul of you
Comes to me only in the mood
Of colours softened in solitude.

Here shall we sit: the world immense
With its noise of war and insolence,
Dwindles to this—a lonely place,
Where memory and love sit face to face!

LILIUM AURATUM

HERE in the moonlight, facing towards the sea
Beside you, I have drawn my single chair.
Your orient fragrance, risen minglingly
With the sea's breath—it is as if her hair
Lay on my nostrils, as it used to be:
Or her sweet bosom: or her shoulders bare:
—I loved to kiss them gently, stealthily
As she lay sleeping. Is she anywhere
In this wide night that she may think of me,
Or is she in some rioting city square
Love reaches not? Ah! well, in everything I see
Her, feel her touch, or yet compare
The sweetness of the universe with her; while she
Forgets?—O it is glorious to be free!
Not planted 'neath the stars to dream and stare
And say "I love you" to the empty air!

II.

You breathe your fragrances over an acre
Of slumbering garden and orderly lawn.

When she was yours, O soul! why did
you take her
To lose her? The arrogant eye of the dawn
Alarms the horizon : the sea-wind
shrinks chilly,
Blowing your breath over meadow
and plain.
Blown o'er the world! And her kisses,
O lily
Whose are the lips that will find them
again?

TIMOTHY IN BLOOM

I CAME upon it suddenly,
Beside a little grove,
A patch of flowering timothy,
It struck me as an oddity,—
Big furry bullrush heads that strove
To cling to specks of dusty mauve,
In regimental unity
Swaying beneath the breezy sky.

Beside a mass of briar rose,
A clump of cedar, scattered spruce,
Dark brilliant green, that always throws
Mauve into soft relief: it goes
Quite perfectly. But what's the use
Of patting nature's back? A goose
In waddling past here, I suppose,
Would know what everybody knows.

I doubt not that I am a fool:
I pulled an armful: in a jar
Of deepest green, just like a pool
In forest patches, dark and cool
I put them. Doubter, there they are.
Admire that flower, but have a care:
It's very dainty: and a touch
From even you, would be too much.

If you would keep them, leave alone
    The lovely things, or use the eye.
For if you maul them, you must own,
Your fingers are too rough: the bone
    Is made to crush: and so they die
    Like bubble rainbows: that is why
Only a memory recalls
The flowering of ephemerals.

A BIRD'S NEST IN WINTER

THERE in the crotch of a naked branch
Look at the nest of May!
Filled up with snow where the eggs once were
And love dwelt for a day.
But the little birds and the big birds
Have flown to follow the sun,—
O why did they leave the house of love
When the day of love was done?

It were better O bird! to pull it down,
For the honour of what was there!
Now the sun and the rain will blacken it
And the wind and the sleet will tear.
Is there anything sadder in this gay world
Than the tree that is shorn of green
And the little pitiful ruined house
Where the mystery of love has been!

NOW ALL THE TIRESOME CLOUDS HAVE PASSED

NOW all the tiresome clouds have passed,
The sun has laid the wraith of March:
The gay gold southern bird at last
Is on his budding lilac perch.
O may he puff his throat and sing!
—Beloved! it is spring!

Tread the glad crocus underfoot,
Dance on the willing violets!
To welcome back your little boot
The happy dandelion frets
Impatient as a human thing!
—Beloved! it is spring!

A YOUNG WOMAN SAYING HER PRAYERS

I SEE her kneeling by the bed
Alone at night,—that is her way.
Again I watch her bow her head
As she begins to pray:
And one dark plaited braid hangs down
Below her hips, to almost meet
Her knees: and through her sheer nightgown
I see her limbs and feet.

I cannot hear the words that pause
Upon her moving lips: her eyes
Are lifted, open wide, because
Of passionate emprise.
There is no crucifix to mark
The spot: no ikon bends above:
She only calls into the dark.
I think she prays for love.

Or says a prayer because of love,
—The things good women have to say
To those strange gods that they know of:
That is a woman's way.
Her head deserves the aureole
The blessed wear in mystic art.
Is it the flowering of her soul?
Or is it just her heart?

SHE IS AS CHANGEFUL AS THE SEA

SHE is as changeful as the sea,
Who wears her frock of blue and grey
With ornaments of ivory
Demurely through the summer day.

At eventide she swiftly dons
An amethystine robe, and gets
A wrap of glittering golden bronze
Trimmed here and there with violets.

The hills their longer shadows throw;
A land breeze follows at the heel;
Her skirts turn deep as indigo
Edged with a frill as blue as steel.

The constant tides: the star that burns
Upon her forehead, and the rain:
—That is her soul, that rises, turns
And like the tides returns again.

FIRESIDE

I SOMETIMES think that I love you best
When the dull grate fire burns low,
And your cheeks take on just the very least
Soft hint of its orange glow,
And your eyes are lit with a kindlier light
And your mouth with a merrier smile,
And you seem to say,—"Come, for to-night
I will love you for a while."

Then I forget that your heart is cold
That you love me not at all,
And my courage leaps, and my arm grows bold
To embrace you: you enthrall
Me, for an instant, to forget
That your heart will never be
All mine,—and, a fool, I linger yet
By the dull red fire, you see.

At daybreak comes a sleepy maid
With her duster and her broom,

To dust the hearth where my fire was
laid
And air the vacant room.
But what does she care for your image
there
As she bangs the window sash
By the emptied chair: and my fire's
glare
Lies dead in a heap of ash.

A SONG OF THE SUMMER NIGHT

WHAT time the closing shadows creep,
And heaven blooms white and blue,
I rock the baby flowers to sleep
In cradles cooled with dew.

Throughout the midnight silence deep
I lean and watch above
The tiny things that curl in sleep
Unconscious of my love.

When in the east the day beams leap,
I slip away: my watch is done,
And as I fade my babies peep
With laughing faces at the sun.

A BLUE PANSY

FROM my coat's lapel to a pretty
bosom,
With a summer's kiss and a laugh
you passed:
Then back, an unexpected relic.
You're not enamel,—you could not last!

O the things that look large and mean
so little!
Let's pick in the sweepings and save just
such
As you. It's odd that a wretched pansy
Should be so little and mean so much'

I.

THE STARS

WE spin and gleam in the net of night,
We laugh, because we must:
The earth is a babe in the lap of space,
And man is a pinch of dust!

II.

THE FLOWERS OF THE FIELDS

The wind may blow us to and fro
For a day. Are we any less
Than the birds and the bees who wave their wings
And fashion foolishness?

III.

THE WIND IN THE GRASS

Consider well while the moons ascend
And the grave grey twilights pass,
That passion is emptiness at the end
Of love, and flesh is grass.

IV.

Cry out to the stars that blink and dream
Of the secrets they know and keep:
For life,—who knows? after death may seem
Improbable as sleep.

FEBRUARY SNOWFALL

I

HIS, will not meet her lips again:
No grief's desire may compass it!
Nor lover's counterfeit of pain
Bedrab the memory exquisite
Of that rare red cool morning flower
That bloomed to smile and closed to kiss —
Her mouth: nor ever any hour
Dull dim the scarlet joy of this!

II

He has no querulous lament.
And she, O can she understand
Into what radiant continent
She drew him with a generous hand?
And if they loved, why extirpate
Flowers of the past with frosty lies?
Chance and not conscience is the gate
Between love and love's paradise.

III

Ah! questions,—wistful as the day
When in the snowflakes sleeps the sun,
A silver orphan in the grey,
He wonders, has he lost or won?

Now poise the swinging balance, sir,
The rabble's honour for a weight,
Against the love that gave you her,
And read the dial of fate.

IV

Ah! well, beyond the sea and sod
A woman in her heart may hold,
Self-wrought an idol like the god
A pagan's fingers writhe in gold.
Leave them illusion who shall dare
Assay the ores of memory.
The snow is shuddering in the air;
There is no silver in the sky!

THE IRIS WALK

I

O COME with me and see the young moon
Slim and nude in the pool of the west,
Afloat in the waters of rose: for soon
She will slip to bed. Come quick! It is best
To catch her now as she bathes and lies
In the corner of sky that she prefers
Just over the walk where the irises rise
To sweeten the eve for this bath of hers.

II

O here we are in the iris walk
Where the crowded blossoms are,
And a thousand new-born crane a stalk
To the moon and the evening star:
And quiet comes as the last birds cease,
And the breezes gather to take
Their sleep: and the trees like a painted piece
Stand stark by the lip of a shell-pink lake.

III

The iris walk: See, on either hand
In the honey and lilac afterglow,
The blue and yellow and purple, and
Pure white. If the day should go

The yellow and white are the same at night,
And the blue and the purple twine;
The breath of their lips as they meet is light
And fragrant cool as the young moonshine.

IV

O stay with me in the iris walk,
For the moon's abed, and this
Is the perfect hour when the shy stars talk
And the lovers wish and kiss:
And the flowers dream on, nor seem to hear,
And yet they are glad thereof.
O what is the dream of the iris, dear,
In the wonder of summer, and night and love?

V.

O love! men say, the slumbering moon
Is a goddess. How would my feet pursue
Her, slipping to sleep in the down of June,
In the welter of darkness and tender dew,
Were I but a god! Like a goddess sweet
Stay with me now that the moon is gone
Till the dawn comes kneeling to kiss your feet.
And I am a god, if you make me one!

MY FRIEND

AND when the lilacs blow
White, blue and lavender
Across the moonlit nights of June
Shall I remember her;
The feet of the fading tide
To seaward slowly bend,
And leave me lonely, yet aware
Of you, my friend.

Breath of the sea that lingered
On twilight's bronzèd sands,
Across the tide-forsaken beach
You caught her, lips and hands:
She whispered—"Death's hereafter
Shall never see the end
Of our soul's fateful handclasp,
My friend, my friend!"

From the dark womb of heaven
Unborn white suns to be
Call to the dead of life and change
In spiralling nebulæ—
"Our souls that barter beauty
Like comrades, can death rend
The gossamer that binds them,
My friend, my friend!"

"O lift the vision upward
From east to occident,
Or from the blind sea burning white
Behold the firmament.
Some place commingling, stars and seas
Where dawns and sunsets blend.
There surely is a meeting-place
For friend and friend!"

No answer in the silence
That dyes the twinkling night:
No voice cries from the purple
Amelt from light to light.
"As one time on the grassy slopes
Of summer, will you lend
Your thigh my head to pillow,
My friend, my friend!"

"See! kindred stars from edge to edge
Of space stretch forth all night
White hands. O for our thousand leagues;
—They sigh through years of light!
From rim to rim of our small sphere
What fable shall I send—
'Love leaps to life the gap of death?'
My friend, my friend!"

And still the lilacs blow
White, lavender and blue,
Across the moonlit tides of June
And I return to you:
But only with unanswered lips
I speak, and then I bend
To brush your brow with one lost kiss,
My friend, my friend!"

HOW I WANT YOU !

HOW I want you! What a pity
London's farther off than Mars!
If I lose you in a city
I shall find you in the stars.

Spring has strolled into October;
May is far away from me.
Let's be godly, grim and sober,
There's a winter yet to be!

No, we scoffed at things diurnal,—
'Tis the soul that understands;
We can hold the spring eternal
Like its flowers between our hands.

That is it, you're always waiting
Where the feet of beauty walk,
Flowers and fragrance hesitating
Till the trees and colours talk.

True, it seems a thousand pities
Lives are trudging to their ends.
What's the odds? Woods, stars or cities
So that we can find our friends?

LIFE

LIFE is the current of unrest
Whose waters hurry down the hill.
Ah! the brave drops that did their best
To hold some accidental rill!
Some swirling spot beneath the sun,
With reeds awave and leaves ablow;
Gay bubbles that must burst and run
Pell mell into the sea below!

IN A GARDEN

GAY trespasser, betaking,
Your way among my flowers,
I see that you are making
Account of your brief hours,
On wide spread wings of pleasure
In gusty breeze and sun
You seem to fill the measure
Of life till day is done.

You last until the even,
And then, some say, you die,
Or flutter off to heaven
Blue-banded butterfly:
Why not another theory,
(I dare say there are lots)
That wings so blue and aery
Become forget-me-nots?

I love you, gay creation
Of gauze and painted wing,
When weary of vexation
And bees that buzz and sting:
I'd like to come to-morrow
When air and sun and dew
Are fresh and sweet and borrow
An hour of life from you.

I'd like to rise and hover
    Above some pretty bud,
And kiss it like a lover
    And feel joy stir my blood.
Alas! for our mad living
    We burn, awake, asleep,
Till nought is left worth giving
    And nought remains to keep.

What profits us our toiling,
    What have we for our pain?
Satiety despoiling
    The pleasure that we gain:
And ills and aches that fetter,
    And cares and griefs that weigh:
—Are our dull years much better
    Than your one joyous day?

COLOUR

WHAT is there other than colour
and light?
Spring has the brush,—let her paint.
Splashing the atmosphere azure and red:
Out of the way! it will drip on your
head!
Green of all shades—green, living green,
Oozing in patches of yellow and white:
Blue, red and pink. There is no
restraint
In this artist's style: she's a heretic-
—quite!

A hundred yards from the top of the hill
A dandelion is a daffodil.
All is colour: what matters the rest?
I love to lounge when the light is best
And see black swallows swoop and glide
Across the blue:
—Don't you?
The deep, strong, burning, beautiful
blue?

THE EMPRESS DAFFODIL

O YOU who flaunt a primrose wing
And wind a golden horn,—
To you the year is only spring
And day is always morn.

An Empress! So your pedigree
Must be a royal one:
Pray, deign to cast your eye on me,
O Daughter of the Sun!

Your sire his smile is bending hot
To your translucent cheek.
O happy! to be loved a lot
And burn up in a week!

Good bye, my friend, your week is through:
Farewell to horn and wing!
Return! and I'll pay court to you
A week again next spring!

WHITE TRILLIUM

THERE was the top of a little hill,
A few scrub pine and a clump of fir.
—I wonder if any are flourishing still
And if their children remember her?
White Trillium; just like the lilies they place
In churches, we said, between kiss and look,
As the breeze of the morning blew in her face
And her big eyes spoke like a printed book.

Spoke, did I say? with words how dear,
Hush! they are not for a man to repeat!
What if the clouds should overhear,
Or a cry be wrung from the moss at my feet!
No spoken word, nor priest, nor ring:
And only a bit of a bird in a tree
Leading the wind who had come to sing,
Witnessed the kisses that gave her to me.

Gather, O children! the gods of the spring
Creep to the edge of the wakening woods,
Laying the fires for the warm days that bring

You and your flock to the deep solitudes.
Come like your forebears in hilltop and
glade,
Silent, discreet, in the pine and the fir,
All that survives of the May day that
made
Lilies of you round the memory of her!

BREEZES AND SUNSHINE

BREEZES and sunshine,
Lilac and woodbine,
Desired of the humming-birds,
Fireflies of daylight:
Daisies and grasses,
Twilight who passes,
Woman of no words,
In star-spattered midnight.

Mindful the dreary
Dust, and the weary
Grind, of the city ways,
Give us the clover!
By a complacent sea
Faced, one can surely be,
Spite of destroying days,
Glad as a lover.

TELEPATHY

I.

A Man Alone

DEEP blue of night: the evening
star!
I sit and wonder where you are.

True, miles of land and leagues of sea
Make endless space 'twixt you and me.
However wide, however far
Your eyes may see the selfsame star,
And seeing which, dear heart, you ought
To have with me the selfsame thought.

We met: we lived: you took a ship
With my kiss red upon your lip.
We will not meet again, I think,
Though every star in heaven may wink,
To urge a re-created past:
—The red mad joy of August last!

Most wonderful! most exquisite!
Take one brief hour to ponder it:
Bring back the vivid days, and tell
My soul if we have lived them well.

II.

At Midnight

HOW dull the dolts who look askance
At life and passion, fate and
chance:
And nailed to faith, yet fail to see
The living soul's telepathy.
Believe in idols, crawl to creeds,
Outraging flowers to worship weeds!

These, scout the fact! it isn't much:
That ardent souls come touch to touch,
Though continents may lie between
And bitter oceans intervene,
With voice as sure as that which braves
The sea of space in ether waves.

One dominant wish pervades me, dear,
One thought I have, as I sit here:
—"O for some flash electrical
To answer to me when I call"!
It cannons on, from star to star:
It will not find you where you are!

III.

Before Dawn

LIKE love's discarded souvenirs
The best days shrivel in the years
We leave behind, till things that are
Lie lost in last year's calendar.

How one would fill the future full
Of days of joy, nights wonderful,
And break time's burial plot to see
Remains of all that used to be.
Were it not futile to expect
My friend of friends, to resurrect
More than the skeleton and skull
That life had once made beautiful!

This is the barrier saturnine
Between those lips of yours and mine,
Stalemate! The game nor lost nor won!
We could not kiss as we have done!

IV.

At Dawn

PALE brow of dawn, faint morning
star:
I sit and wonder where you are.

The earth spins on, and I believe
To you it is the star of eve!
You, from your window, bending far
May breathe upon my morning star,
And some strange eyes may gaze with
you
Into the foreign twilight blue.
But if my star you catch and see
A second stolen to give to me
Will not be missed. Alas! the light!
—It perishes! dear heart, good night!

RED TRILLIUM

BLOOD-RED trillium in a pocket
Of pine needles crisp and dead,
What a pity that she crushed you
With the pressure of her head!

She is kind: she would have spared you
Had she known that you were there.
But, you perished like a lover
With your red lips in her hair!

A HYBRID DELPHINIUM

I.

LISTEN to me! You!
Raising your head in an ardour of blue,
By the lilac and phlox,
Where the pæony knocks
Big blossoms of red weighted down with the dew.

II.

I knew your mother, my friend.
There she is wavering, down at the bend
Of the deep border row
Where the irises blow
In the spring, where the clumps of the white lilies end.

III.

I knew your father—him too:
A stout lordly giant in blue,
Spreading his chest
Where the sunshine fell best—
He never had knowledge nor care about you.

IV.

He put on the airs of a king:
Monarch of flowers! and a thing
Like marriage? The prig!
He did not care a fig
For an exquisite consort, a priest and a ring.

V.

You know how humming-birds gather
Round your blue faces? they'd rather
Balance and drink
From your sweet throats, I think
Than any. They captured your celibate father.

VI.

Pollen of pearl on a humming-bird's bill
Wedded your mother to him, to fulfil
What nature most needs,
Strong sires and tough seeds,
And babies of blue on the side of the hill.

VII.

That's where you were with your brothers,
Lord! there were myriads of others!
People don't cry
Over millions who die—
That must be left to their mothers!

BLUE HEPATICA

I.

O BLOOD-ROOT and hepatica
And dog-tooth violet,
Abloom in a rug of fallen leaves
Bronzed and unbroken yet:
There's a hint of grass in a grove of trees
And maybe a cow or two,
And a cool blue sky, with the good sun nigh,
And you, my love, and you.

II.

O little flowers that quicken the life
In spring, I love, I think,
Hepatica best, with her downy limbs
And cheeks of mauve and pink;
Never forgetting the dearest one
Which had caught such a tender blue
From the dawn of a day in a bygone May,
When I picked her, love, for you.

III.

O let us go back to the care-free groves
Of spring, and the merry hours,

With a seat and a smoke on a sunny bank
Or a kiss in a bed of flowers!
While the crows in pairs flew in the sky;
There were always only two,
For joy. It was good in that wild wild wood
With you, O love! with you!

REQUIEM

O THOU who wert all men's desire,
Roses and dew and the breath of fire!
Where art thou now that the grim earth covers
The body that craved for a hundred lovers?
Where is it now, that reeling kiss
That made men drunk in passion? This
Is lost on the lips of the wind that whines
Through the passionless limbs of the graveyard pines!

Where is the breast that men devoured:
The shoulder and nape, where kisses poured
From mad lips muttering and nostrils panting,
Twined in thine arms? thy light heart granting
All that men asked — more than could give!
O wonder woman! he did not live
Could take full measure that thy love gave!
Art thou at peace in this paltry grave?

That was thy body. What of the soul
Behind those eyes? Could death control
That fierce and hungry and glad spectator
Who widened thine eyes? O death is greater
Than lust and hunger and love of man,
That was thy soul! Yes, stronger than
Life's red desire in the stubborn breast
Is the hand of death in his last arrest!

Lie in your mound till the final day
When earth and heaven have passed away.
Then, shall we know who is really master
Life or death? And the last disaster
—If the soul die as the body dies
What is the fate of those wanton eyes
That hunted men. — It is sad, my friend
This pinch of gravel will be thine end!

A SPRING GARDEN

VIOLETS in sky-blue patches,
And cowslips tinted sulphur
In the half-shade, and sturdy beds
Where golden tulips prosper!
Out from beneath the trees
Where space is open and sunny,
Crowding the clumps of hyacinth
Purple and blue and honey.

The sun's on high: the tulips
Open transparent faces:
And the faint sweet blended odours
Drift through the budding spaces,
Where the flowers of the summer, like babies,
Some day to grow to blossom
Gaze on the pageant of spring,
Tugging at earth's brown bosom.

DURING THE FOREST FIRES

THE smell of smoke, the reek of
fire,
The wish of summer in the earth,
Perhaps again has brought to birth
Desire.

The flowers are knocking at the door,
The doves of heaven droop and coo.—
Alas! for voice and touch of you
—No more!

INSPIRATION

RED as your maple tree
On a clear September day,
Is the blood of my heart aflowing
Since you came in my way.

Purple and gold my dreams,
Crimson my songs, all through:
—I may sing to a thousand men:
I am singing only for you!

MOTORING IN WINTER

SNOW with a crust of apricot
And a gold sky welding tree to tree
On the country road,—and there is
not
A soul but you and me.

So, stop the engine. See the motes
Of ice in the air! And we
In spite of furs and overcoats
Are free, O love! are free!

O far down hill the river steams
With frost like a simmering pot:
Two lean crows skim with famished
screams
Across the apricot.

Then silence: silence. Here at least
One is alone. Your lips!—So soon
We turn to face the bitter east
And the grim green circle of the moon.

Snow with a crust of apricot
And a gold sky welding tree to tree.
This is our world: and there is not
—A soul but you and me!

REMEMBER

I.

Remember only this, dear one,
The fragrances of summer gone:
And do not dwell with dubious eyes
On rainy hours and mouldy skies.
When flowers of memory flare and fleet
Pluck only those whose smell is sweet:
And for a vacant hour, may be,
Wear at your heart in reverie
A posy from dead pods that shed
Live seeds in memory's flower bed.

II.

A sheaf perhaps of heliotrope
To hold: mechanically,
Re-set the broken bones of hope
In lily of the valley.
The common rose and violet,
Young sentiment's obsessions:
Syringa clusters, mignonette—
Red moons and night-mad passions.

III.

Yet all are good at last, my friend:
Life leaves this garden at the end,
With pleasant ways where older feet
Repace the paths where youth was sweet:

Re-making love, forgetting loss:
Appraising fire and joy, because
The one is spent, the ash is won:
The other sped, the flash is gone:
Marvelling at malice, envy, hate,
And all bad weeds. The garden gate
Opens on peace: each human thing
Still loitering and remembering.

WILD COLUMBINE

I.

THERE is a roadway, known to few,
Awinding into a maze of green,
Where little rivulets run through
The wildwood: here and there, between
Some rocky hills that rise up sheer
With blackberry and bramble vine,
And flaming patches far and near
Of gay vermillion columbine.

II.

I see a hillside arching up,
A shadowed valley bending deep:
Caught in a glorious verdant cup
A quiet flock of browsing sheep:
And thee—who wert the voice of morn
Made visible, those feet of thine
Spurning the brushwood, burr and thorn
To pick a sheaf of columbine!

III.

O thou who wert the woods' delight,
Wherein arbutus, violet,
And shy pale things that flee the light,
Hoping their pallid love may get

A bridal twilight,—that was thine
Own element! To match thy lip—
An armful of wild columbine
Under thy bosom's guardianship!

IV.

Thee, tripping down the rocky hill,
Joy in thine eyes, thy voice in tune,
To sing aloud of love and fill,
The merry emptiness of June,
I saw. I took thee to my heart,
And in a picture-book of mine,
Wild spirit, ever more thou art
Among the coral columbine!

SONG

O LET me take you in my arms
And kiss you on the lips:
O let me look into your eyes
As brown as apple pips.

Deep in dark pupils as I gaze
The iris curtains roll
Back, further back, until at length
I look into your soul.

IN A PINE GROVE ON A WINTER AFTERNOON

TO-DAY mislaid my memory
Of you,
Until I stood in lonelines:
The blue
Of winter on the bosomy snow,—
A sun illusion—Ah you know!
I know, I know, I *know*, you know
Because you knew.

Beneath the blackened pines
My hand
Sought yours at once, remembering.
This land
Is overwhelmed in clouds slipped down
In feet of feathery frozen down,
From sun blue deeps that never frown—
You understand.

Therefore I wish for you
To see
The simple, awful, empty beauty here
With me.
The black blue indigo and white, I swear,
Find gold life vibrating the violet air,
Panting for flowers and gums and woman's hair—
Yours it may be.

ILLUSION

I BLOW my smoke in a ring.
It floats for a moment upward,
Till it looks like a nebulous halo
Round a big bright beautiful star.

Alas! it is only smoke!
And it fritters itself away:
And yet I shall blow another ring
For I love a fair illusion.

TRANSIENCE

LIKE the departure of guests,
(After the lights on the gems and
the shoulders,
The flowers and the food and the
wines of a dinner invests
Commonplace life with a glamour)
—Bang goes the door like a hammer:
Smashing the gold heels of laughter
Fleeting away: and thereafter
Emptiness squints like an enemy
Into our breasts.

True! mirth and laughter expire:
Until unwholesome and fidgety
people
Sigh at illusion, blaspheming pleas-
ure's desire!
Joyless—what souls could be duller
Seeking for substance in colour:
Sunsets and moonshine and music and
living,
Move pass and perish, to transience
giving
Joy for a second detected
Poking the fire!

A ROSE

I STILL have a little rose,
Brittle and dry and dead:
You kissed it and gave it to me
When it was red.

I still sit alone and think
Of the best of its perfume and dew.
It is here: I shall kiss it to life!
For it is you!

SONG

TO-NIGHT some stars are very white
And some are green and blue:
But all the light of all the stars
Seems just to shine for you,
—For you,
Seems just to be for you!

Some flowers are golden in the fields
And some are red and blue:
But all the flowers of every shade
Seem just to bloom for you,
—For you,
Seem just to live for you!

Some songbirds flash on scarlet wings
And some on wings of blue:
But every bird that mates and sings
Seems just to sing for you,
—For you,
Seems just to sing for you.

Sometimes the sky is black with clouds
And sometimes only blue:
O that's the sky, with the sun on high
That seems just meant for you,
—For you,
That seems just made for you!

A QUESTION

O TELL me, thou blue river
That strainest to the sea,
Will that salt death deliver
The soul that urges thee?

All life is but a torrent
Afevering to the end
Where the great deep and current
In blue confusion blend.

O tell me, thou blue traveller
What mystery resides
Beyond the dead sea leveller
The swallower of tides?

AT NIGHT

THERE is no road but open air,
A lamp-black night of space and star:
And the moon hangs low, an orange moon:
We steer for that, and here we are.

Just you and I. What matters, dear?
The fresh cut hay dies in the dew,
And the air is full of its parting soul:
If it were not the clover, it might be you.

O the road is bad, and the way is dark,
And it's only the moon we're steering for:
Yet, I say, as I kiss your finger tips,
Though it's only an hour, can one live more?

Good night, my friend, for our hour is gone:
The perfume dies from the distant hay
As the City lights glare white again
And the moon behind fades red away.

THE GRAMOPHONE

I.

YOUR voice thrills down the April street,
And tired, squalid people stop
With gaping mouths: grimed ears entreat
A better hearing: aprons mop
The swelter off the dirty brow.
—Sing on! sing on! O glorious voice!
Your throbbing notes can make rejoice
These faded worms, who nod and bow
And rhythmically follow thee:
—O singer knowest thou!

II.

The labourer lifts his dusty head:
The washerwoman for an hour
Foregoes the tub: a girl in red
Has stolen a scarlet flower
To put in her abandoned hair.
O each has felt the stroke of life!
The silly drunkard's bruisèd wife
Forgives her beating, gaping there,
To breathe the full fresh voice of thee:
—O singer dost thou care!

III.

Unconscious as the flowers that bloom
To fill with joy the humble poor,
You sing of love in that dark room:
The listeners tiptoe at the door
To touch the pulse of life that now
Upon one flaming note is flung!
Joy! joy! O mellow voice and young!
These weary loafers sway and bow
Unto the living youth of thee:
—O singer knowest thou'

IV.

There's flower and grass in field and
park,
And benches where the weary rest:
There's twilight and the cool sweet dark
To sleep: and yet they love the best
The pavement and the gusts that blow
Hot dust and dirt upon the street,
For life pervades them, crimson-sweet
Wild life that makes them reach and bow
To grasp the strong young life of thee.
—O singer dost thou know!

VIEW OF OTTAWA FROM A DISTANCE—LATE OCTOBER

I.

THE city is snug in a wrap of grey
Chinchilla the earth has cast away:
It is vesper time, and I hear a bell
From a church: far-off looms the big hotel
Where we lived and kissed and laughed for a day!

II.

The sweet bell rings, and the daylight goes
Over the hills in amber and rose.
O she as a bride and I a groom
Loved for a night. Who has that room?
—Likely, a stranger whom nobody knows!

III.

O a gust of flame, and your tale is told
Love! with your kisses manifold!
A coarse cheek lies on the very place,
The pillow on which she laid her face
As she slept, and the night waned into gold.

IV.

I know it was so, for I did not sleep.
I took one wisp of her hair to keep.
They should treat that room like a little
shrine
Deserted a while. O woman of mine!
—Now do you doubt that a man can
weep?

V.

The trees are stark in a drape of tears
Grey as the passions of other years.
Tree, church and shop, and the big hotel
Mean nothing to me now. It is as well
That the glad flower fell to the hungry
shears.

A WILD IMMORTELLE

I.

AMONG the soft pine needles
In sunlight sweet as sighs,
We settled down together
To drink each other's eyes.
Above, the leafy mountain:
Below, a brambly dell,
And growing up between us
A single immortelle.

II.

Wild, white! It lasts forever!
We took it for a sign
Of all the ardent promise
Between your eyes and mine:
A flower,—an everlasting,
It must be symbol of
The first white faith of lovers
In everlasting love!

III.

Among the dead pine needles
That gather like used years,
I sit again reflecting.
The sunshine dim as tears
Drifts up the empty mountain
Dips down the brambly dell.
—Ah! love may be a flower
But not an immortelle!

THE UNFAITHFUL

I.

CANST thou forget the clover breath
Of June? The fields that swarmed
With bees and butterflies, the heath
The dandelions warmed:
The deep birch gullies and the rills,
The lakes where waterlilies grew,
The skyline building clouds and hills
In towers of battlemented blue?

II.

Thee, best beloved! when memory grips
The hand of consciousness, thy hand
Stretched ready, and thy passionate lips
Hold, beckon, whisper, understand!
Cast off in August's summer ark
We drifted into flaming skies,
And onward through strange seas, as dark
As the wild darkness of your eyes!

III.

Thou hast forgotten! In the soul
Of thee returns no more
The sensuous fragrance from the bowl
Of love's cut flowers! Before
The fickle, fitful northern fires
Turned green and rosy over me,
New eyes that promised new desires
Had laid their spell on thee!

AN ALTAR CLOTH

THE altar cloth that she vowed the Madonna,
Of flowers worked into a bit of the sky,
Is gathering dust, as forgotten, on a
Chair it lies where she dropped it,—why?

A needle is stuck in the network, bearing
The last lost blue of a strand of thread,
For a sprig of delphinium, despairing
It must die unformed. It is better dead!

Her zeal for the Mother of God diminished
As love died too. O these vows of ours!
So the altar cloth will remain unfinished
Till the moth-worm feeds on its fateful flowers!

RETROSPECT

WHAT is left?—Only the exquisite
touch
Of hands in the twilight: the intimate
pressure
Of lips in the darkness. So much
That it fills up the infinite measure
Of beauty for me. It was fine
In the gloom of the dawn to find stealing
Your arm, reassuring, while mine
Groped under your arm, my hand feeling
Its way to your neck. Ah! the nape—
Where I grasped you and held your face
to me!
I raise that hand now: it is hid by a
shape
Like your head. Ah! the lips that
thrilled through me!
They live on my lips—in my heart, for a
beat!
—Your love was my garden, and
memory is sweet!

II.

All that is noblest and dearest survives.
And the singing of music, or often the
trilling
Of birds in the dawn: the flame breath
that lives

On the hem of the purple of sunset, fulfilling
A promise of hope for a morrow of sun:
The gay breeze of night through the window, and even
The strangeness of moonset: a million and one
White stars that walk deftly in heaven—
Bear witness to you and the love that we had!
As the seed pod may say of the blossom it wore—
"But for you, I could never have been!"
Be not sad:
For the landlord of life may have reckoned the score
Too high at the time. But we paid with the last
Of our tears. They have dried in the flowers of the past!

ADIEU

I.

A HIGH cloud spreads a silver wing
Across the noonday roof of blue;
It seems so sad just as the spring
Turns life to flower in everything,
To say, to say,—Adieu!

II.

Not yet the daffodil has died!
The tulip stretches out her stem:
What promise may the broad fields hide
For summer? One must put aside
For good, the joy of them!

III.

Spring and her train mean only this,
The memories of love and you.
New springs will come and lightly miss
Your voice—the mystery of your kiss;
A vanished flower or two.

IV.

To me, the watcher by the stream
Of blossoms passing in review,
Their faces marching through my dream
Of beauty, they will always seem
To seek the soul of you.

V.

For you are beauty. What is love,
Who idly flies from old to new?
A painted insect in the grove
Of life's wild garden. Let him move
To one more flower for you.

VI.

Let grey clouds spread a tender wing
Across the happy roof of blue:
O it is sad, just as the spring
Makes it so good to love and sing—
To sigh and say,—Adieu!

FINALE

CONSIDER: — destiny will lead
Us mercilessly to the end
Of all endeavour, and the dead
Will welcome us, as friend by friend
In passing by the hushèd gates
We slip from life's gregarious mob,
Oblivious of old hopes and hates
And laugh and sob.

Then you will lie in one strait plot,
And I beneath another stone.
Perhaps a far-off foreign spot
Will claim you. It is sad, I own,
To think on distance, and the birth
Of centuries, when both will be
Conglomerate with the crust of earth
Across a sea.

What matter? Priests may sing a mass:
We will not heed, because
The summer grass will flower and pass,
The flighty bird will pause,
To pick a straw, to build a nest:
The skies will rage and weep,
Above the places where we rest
And merely sleep.

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